



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

and our niches filled, with images of Christ, the good doing good, said they. It drove Erasmus into a train of reflection,—“But when we think that statuary and painting, formerly regarded as liberal arts, are a kind of silent poesy, and have often an effect on the feelings of mankind beyond that produced by the most accomplished orator;—it might have been well to have corrected their superstition without destroying their utility.” To cite an instance of our day. Time was, when the Cross, so appropriate a symbol and furnishing an ornament for the spires of our Christian churches, would have been considered an abomination by the good people. We are “correcting the superstition.” Utilitarians could not be expected to be much addicted to poetry, or the symbols of poetic meaning. Barnyard cocks and arrows—emblems of the passions and war, not of love and peace—will tell which way the wind blows, and these have topped our steeples, while the Cross, with outspread arms for benediction, and head lifted towards heaven, has been anathematized for Superstition’s sake. We see a change approaching—the high and appropriate poetry of the Cross is to be recognized, and the whirligig cock, so provocative of the symbolization of wavering faith, is to be abandoned.*

We leave for another time a closer con-

sideration of the respective superiorities of Painting and Poetry, as embodiments of Art-conceptions.

THE
BEAUTIFUL IN INORGANIC NATURE
AND IN THE
VEGETABLE KINGDOM.

(Translated from the French of M. Pictet.)

WHERE can we, as patient observers, take a position that will enable us in any manner to grasp the Beautiful as it springs to life, or so place ourselves that we may analyse its simplest elements? Shall it be in the human soul? But the human soul, in its earliest stages at least, exists simply as a mirror, in which, the Beautiful is reflected before it can be reproduced, and besides its impressions and its judgments are infinitely variable. Shall it be within the domain of Art? But Art is divided into, and appropriated to a thousand distinct regions, according to time, place, and its numerous ramifications. Whatever might be our stand-point, it could be contested by considering it in relation to another, and there is no escape from the difficulty but by directly placing ourselves in that sphere of observation where the Beautiful exists independently of man and of his influences, and that sphere is Nature.

In the realm of Nature, truly, is the Beautiful born, developed, and preserved independently of our participation. We see it, we feel it, each one, perhaps, in his own way, but assuredly we do not create it. Nature, subjected as she is to constant laws, which man can neither amend nor alter, gives birth to Beauty wherever the necessary conditions for its realization come together. She displays her treasures in the profoundest solitudes as well as immediately under the eyes of intelligent beings. But this is not all; the direct influence of man when not strictly confined to assisting Nature, and when employed upon a modification of her works to suit the caprice of his own fancy, is rather than otherwise unfavorable to the outgrowth of natural beauty. The picturesque in attractive forms is not visible in cultivated countries. Foliage fashioned by the hand of man, and animals trained to the yoke or wantonly mutilated for useful purposes, do not appear to us, in any wise, as the most perfect forms. Thus then, in seeking in Nature, for the phenomena of Beauty, we are sure to find them in their unalloyed state.

But what is understood by Nature? for this is a vague word, and one susceptible of diverse interpretations. There is no demand upon us here to investigate the metaphysical sense of the term, but rather to determine its extension, in order not to be confined to a sphere so restricted that the principle of the Beautiful might well escape us. If Nature existed for us only as the material world, divorced from the world of feeling and judgment, it would be necessary to seek for the principle of Beauty in matter itself; and assuredly there it cannot be found. Nature is something else besides matter: she is animated throughout by forces belonging to the great first cause from which proceed life and emotion, and the laws which regulate

and control all action. For our purposes, then, we shall commence by regarding Nature as matter, but this term shall only embrace the aggregate of animate and inanimate beings, which fill the external world with their infinite variety, associated with a study of the laws and forces which preside over their formation and development. Nature stops where the free activity of the mind begins, which is no longer within its domain.

This immense world of realities presents itself to us, classified into distinct kingdoms, ranked one above the other in an order of graduated perfection, and these may be called so many separate realms of Nature. From close observation, more and more confirmed by the progress of science, these realms, commencing with the lowest, that is to say, the mineral kingdom, are so interlinked that each serves as a base and necessary condition to that which succeeds it in the ascending scale. We are, therefore, naturally led to investigations in the same order, of the phenomena of the Beautiful to see if in their development they follow a progressive march analogous to that of the three kingdoms.

At the first round of the ladder we find the inorganic world, with the elements and their infinite combinations as a broad and solid basis for the whole of external Nature. Inasmuch as this basis contains every material condition of subsequent beings it offers us, if not the Beautiful itself, at least, its palpable idea and its imperfect rudiments. But these primitive elements are yet but isolated, in some sort in the rough, and indicating no character but that which results immediately from their simple nature.

As the foremost among these ideas of natural Beauty, we may mention *light*, the sensation of which in us is always accompanied with real pleasure apart from its necessity as a general condition of our faculty of seeing. The analogy that exists between the idea of light and that of beauty is already apparent in various languages, by the terms applied to the Beautiful, which terms are derived from a notion conveying the sense of brilliancy. The agreeable effect of the luminous sensation plays an important part in the development of every degree of Beauty. It constitutes the first sentiment of admiring pleasure, which the infant experiences on the threshold of life, and with the uncivilized man it frequently stands for the idea of true Beauty, for which he is as yet unfitted.

If light in its purity be already present to our mind as analogous to the Beautiful, it becomes still more significant when it penetrates the dark depths of matter, and gives birth to the various and brilliant phenomena of color. It is in the mineral kingdom that these phenomena begin to strike us with marked effect; and it is bodies, which by their denseness and hardness most completely convey an idea of matter; it is the precious metals and brilliant jewels which reflect the phenomena of color with so great splendor. The play of light through the different mediums which reflect its rays, through water, air, and vapor, often excites the liveliest admiration. It is only necessary to mention the sight of the rainbow, which, in all ages, has so powerfully affected the imagination

* Being a case in point, we turn into a note a paragraph from a cotemporary journal, which came to our notice just as we had written our article:—

“**POPPY-HEADS.**—Bishop Meade of Virginia, who is one of the lowest of Low-church Episcopalians, exercises a most untiring vigilance in guarding his diocese against the insidious aggressions of Puseyism and Popery. A few years since, one of the churches of Norfolk having placed crosses on the pinnacles of their church tower, the Bishop peremptorily had them removed. A correspondent of the *New York Churchman*, whose indignation is no little stirred at the spectacle of the Bishop’s iconoclastic spirit, thus notices a more recent occurrence:—

“A circumstance has recently come to my knowledge, which has not, I think, as yet been noticed in any of the Church journals, and which forcibly illustrates the ignorance, bigotry, and superstition which so strongly characterize the Puritan party in the Church. A short time ago the chapel at the Theological Seminary at Alexandria, Virginia, having been found too small, an addition was made to it, and the chapel at the same time was re-seated; in doing so, the ends of the seats, instead of being as heretofore plain, were made to terminate with a poppy-head of the simplest description. On this being seen by the Right Reverend Bishop Meade, he at once issued his bull, that the said trefoils were too much like crosses, and he therefore commanded that they should be forthwith decapitated, which was accordingly done, to the intense disgust of, not only the few sound Churchmen who yet survive in Virginia under the chilling influences of its present ecclesiastical ruler, but likewise of all men of taste, sense, and judgment.”—*Presbyterian*.

of men, as to lead them to attach this brilliant phenomenon to religious mystery, or to the myths of tradition. The whiteness of snow, the blue of the sky, the vivid splendors of the aurora borealis, are so many phenomena producing upon us impressions of the Beautiful. It is to be remarked always that these impressions are oftentimes of a complex nature, because they are, on the one hand, combined with other special elements of the Beautiful, and, on the other hand, with ideas in associative relations which they themselves excite in us.

This is more true of another class of phenomena presented to us by inorganic Nature, namely, the vehicle of *sound*. The important part that sound plays in the domain of the Beautiful is well known, since it constitutes the element of a particular branch of the Fine Arts, namely music. In the inorganic world, sound is not yet within itself expressive, expression only resulting from a blind conflict of bodies in motion; nevertheless, we are instinctively brought to associate with matter the idea of expression. What are voluntarily termed the voices of Nature, when they are grand or terrible, like the raging of the tempest and the sea, the crash of thunder, the roar of the cataract, the crackling of the torrent, all appear to us to be the voices of angry powers: when they are sweet and melodious, like the rustling of leaves, or the murmur of the brook, they produce upon us the effect of plaintive or joyous language, according to accessory circumstances or the disposition of our spirit at the time. The impression here, then, is more complicated still than with the phenomena of light. A pure sound may assuredly give pleasure by itself, and without an associate idea; but inorganic Nature does not offer to us sounds of this description, for they begin to be produced only in the animal kingdom.

We come now to the principal element of natural Beauty, *form*. In its first degree of development, however, form is but purely material, and only in that grade takes a secondary position in relation to the Beautiful. The grand forms of inorganic Nature are always the result of fortuitous combinations, effected by powerful and sometimes greatly disturbing forces, and thus they impress us rather more by mass than by form. The picturesque effect of mountains for example, far from being the result of regular form, proceeds on the contrary, from an aggregate of disorder, sudden surprises, and violent contrasts, to which may be added the varied effects of light and of color.

The first traces of form, properly so called, are, nevertheless, shown in crystallization, where form is no longer a simple accident, but the expression of an interior principle, which determines it. There is here, therefore, an additional degree of development. The predominance of an active force is revealed by the unity of form, and by the disposition of every part in a certain order. It is what is termed *regularity*, a principle which is of endless recurrence as a condition of the Beautiful in its most elevated degrees. But the regular form of the crystal, wholly composed of triangles and quadrilaterals, of straight lines and smooth planes, expresses still too much the rigidity and poverty of geometrical figures to de-

serve the name of Beautiful. Only by their grandeur and massiveness do forms of this character produce upon us a strong impression, and yet this impression cannot be completely assimilated with those excited by the Beautiful. The contemplation of grand basaltic formations like the Giant's Causeway, or like Fingal's Cave, in Staffa, belong to this description of impressions; and we encounter them even in the domain of Art, but Art only, at the period of its origin, visibly in the ancient monuments of Egypt; for what are the obelisks and pyramids but gigantic crystals, fashioned and constructed by the hand of man?

By the side of forms solely regular, the inorganic world, nevertheless, presents others more varied, and which even, by their capricious arrangement, seem occasionally to forestall the more elevated creations of higher kingdoms. Thus, in the magnificent caverns of stalactites, of which so many wonders are related, it seems as if the genii of the earth had fashioned matter with the purpose of veritable artists, creating as if for amusement, an entire subterranean world of significant forms. One can scarcely persuade himself that all this fantastic architecture, this delicate sculpture, this crystallized foliage, those statues so boldly executed, can be other than the caprices of chance, and the work of blind forces; and yet it is so. We must also bear in mind that the lively impression produced by these wonders upon the spectator, and which find vent in enthusiastic descriptions, is due, in a great measure, to unexpectedness, to surprise, to the accessory circumstance of an obscurity partially dissipated by the moving glimmer of a torch. It is probable that in the light of day all this phantasmagoria would lose much of the charm with which the imagination surrounds it. Curvilinear forms being again higher elements of the Beautiful, appear but slightly in inorganic Nature, otherwise than as the result of motion, and consequently like passing phenomena. It is so with the balance of the wave, and the capricious change of the cloud, impelled by the winds; but in both cases, it is an association of accompanying ideas and circumstances, that enable these spectacles to agitate the mind with esthetical impressions.

Behold, then, nearly all which the first kingdom of nature offers us of elements of the beautiful. Light, color, sound, regular form, but without life; form irregular, but fleeting and uncertain; such are the phenomena affecting us, in certain circumstances, with a sentiment of admiration. Let us now see what becomes of these elements in the more elevated range of the vegetable kingdom. It is only in the organic world that begins, properly speaking, the individuality of being. A crystallized body possesses truly, by virtue of its regular form, a kind of individual unity; but the force to which this unity is owing becomes inactive the moment its purpose is accomplished, and it apparently, at least, lives no longer than to stamp its result. Furthermore, this force acts only upon homogeneous matter, upon a certain number of particles, all of the same character, which are combined together, undergoing in no respect any modification. In the plant, on the contrary, the first production

of organic life, the principle of unity appears at once as a permanent centre of activity. From the opening shoot of the germ to the death of the organism, this central activity is constantly at work combining, and at the same time separating the various organs and functions of the plant, as they are transformed by its active power, assimilating little by little the diverse particles of matter which go to make up its visible form. This is the principle of organic life.

Three things are, therefore, apparent in the plant: first, its body, or the diverse substances harmonized into the unity of its proper form; next, its functions, or the activity of its different organs from which results the development of its form; and finally, the principle which serves as a bond to these functions and as a law to the diverse play of organic forces. By matter and forces the plant belongs to the real world, but by the third principle it is elevated to another sphere; for this central unity which reigns superior over both matter and forces, could neither be of itself force nor matter; let it be called law, let it be called type or otherwise, it is certain to be an immaterial or ideal principle by which the plant is brought into contact with the world of spirit and intelligence. I say contact simply, because the plant is not intelligent; but it becomes revealed to intelligence, as if it were an object belonging specially to the domain of intelligence. Therein lies the impossibility of attributing to blind chance even the formation of the simplest organism.

This *idea* of the plant expressing itself so silently by visible form and by vegetative life, constitutes at the same time its *truth*. The savage or the peasant sees the plant materially as it is seen by Linnæus; both know its properties, and they consequently render the plant useful; but that complete comprehension which is the result of a thorough understanding of vegetable characteristics, belongs only to the botanist whose observing eye knows how to distinguish the essential from the accidental. He alone then sees the plant in its truth or in its *idea*. With him, however, this *idea*, arrived at by the labor of comparison, is in itself no more than an abstract notion, whilst in the real plant the *idea* and its visible manifestation are a unity, and they are inseparable. No one part of the plant taken by itself, constitutes its *idea*, for this, the *idea*, results from a whole and the mutual relations of parts to it; but it is also certain that these relations and that whole result in their turn from the *idea* which governs them. In this there is neither before nor after; all is given simultaneously, and the thought alone separates by abstraction that which is intimately and harmoniously united in reality.

This general *idea*, this abstract type of the plant, possesses great interest for science; but it has very little in an esthetical point of view, for the domain of abstractions is not the domain of the Beautiful. What interests us here above everything else, is the visible form; but, for ulterior considerations, it must be stated that this form is in itself only the expression of an invisible and immaterial principle, in a word—of an *idea*.

Compared with those of the inorganic

world, the elements of the beautiful are thus presented in new characters, and of a more elevated order. The rigidity of forms characterized by mass and surface, disappears to give place to a graceful freedom of contour, and the straight line no longer encroaches beyond the limits of its inferior position. From this results an infinite variety of objects, the rich details of which are regularly disposed among themselves, but in a thousand different ways. Color is displayed with more striking effect, and especially with more art in the combinations and contrasts of its graduated tints. Motion and sound, although they are not yet the expression of sentiment and free-will, have still quite another sense than in lifeless nature. The swinging of the tree agitated by the wind varies in character, according to its position, and according to the form of its leaves and branches: it is the same with its rustling music, just as if each tree had a vocal organ of its own. It is the union of these elements which gives to plants their individual physiognomy, and stamps their significance as special beauty.

Now, this union is precisely the visible expression of what we have called the idea or the type of each plant, to which idea or type the individuals of each species more or less approach, but from which they cannot recede without being lost. This is what is understood by the term *relative beauty*,—a very important point in an esthetical connection, and one that will frequently occur. The nearer a plant realizes its type, or its ideal, the more it becomes beautiful relatively; and in the same way do we apply the epithet ugly to every individual that remains too far behind the ideal of its species. A proof to what point the fact of the beautiful depends upon a relation to its type is, that every time the harmony of its unity is disturbed, the impression of the beautiful disappears. The beauty of the rose is not that of the lily; the beauty of the oak is not that of the cedar or the palm; and a tree which could affect the forms or the bearing of a different species might appear to us curious, but it certainly would be no longer beautiful. Besides all this, the complete realization of an inferior type better satisfies our esthetic sentiment than an imperfect expression of a superior type, and in this sense a rose may be ugly, and a mushroom beautiful.

If we consider the plant apart from the successive phases of its growth, we shall recognize that the culminating point of its vegetable life is also the moment of its greatest beauty. This moment generally coincides with that of its efflorescence, and in the flower are displayed with the greatest richness, the elegance of form, and the brilliancy of color.

The same fact is demonstrated more fully, when we consider the vegetable kingdom in its aggregate. In relation to the Beautiful, this kingdom is elevated in proportion as the vegetable type, the general idea of the plant, is realized with the greatest power. This kingdom, it is well known, is divided into three great natural classes, distinguished among themselves by successive gradations in the organization of plants. The *acotyledons* (ferns, lichens, etc.) only very imperfectly represent the idea of the plant. Algae, lichens, mosses, mush-

rooms present but simple elementary forms to the eye, scarcely reaching beyond the figures which inorganic Nature also produces. The number of their organs is very limited, the phenomena of efflorescence is entirely wanting, and they sometimes only arrest the mind, through color, the most material, in some respects, of the principles of the Beautiful. It is in this order of productions that we even encounter forms that inspire us with a sort of instinctive repulsion, as among animals of inferior classes. The *monocotyledons cryptogamea*, the brake, the club-moss, already offer forms more developed, and the flowering plants of the same family (*phanerogams*) are, little by little, elevated through the series of grasses and rushes, to the elegant and majestic palm, as well as to the brilliant flowers of the lily tribe, etc. Finally, the noblest plants, those which make the principal ornament of the globe, belong to the *decotyledons*, the most perfect also in the matter of organization. Here are found, combined in the highest degree, the imposing grandeur of the aggregate plant, and the richness of detail, the harmony of form and of color, the majesty of bearing, and the magnificence of the flower. That which constitutes progress from one class to another is, that the general type of the plant becomes, thus to say, always richer in means of expression: its organs, in fact, and through them its forms multiply as it advances, so well that botany has by numbers graduated this progressive series, by showing that the number two and its multiples govern the first class, the number three and its multiples, the second; and finally, that the numbers four and five, with their multiples, represent the highest class.

After these observations in detail, and in order to convey a just idea of the esthetic value of the vegetable kingdom, there still remains the consideration of its distribution over the terrestrial portions of the globe, which it covers everywhere like a magnificent mantle; let us fancy to ourselves what the earth would present to our eyes deprived of this many-colored garment, whose tints are so constantly renewed by its vital forces; and also strive to comprehend and admire the harmony which reigns over the general disposition of form and color, according to their adaptation to the diverse regions and vegetable zones of the planet. Upon this interesting subject Humboldt has published a pamphlet, filled with ingenious and profound suggestions. He remarks, and with reason, that if the characteristic physiognomy of different countries be composed of the union of natural phenomena, of the forms of mountains and clouds, of the degree of atmospheric purity, of the aspect of animal organization, it should not, however, be denied that the principal element of the entire impression it makes is to be found in vegetation. Animal forms have too little mass, and their constant locomotion too often screens them from our sight, whilst the vegetable forms, by their agglomeration and their immovability, act every instant upon the imagination. Humboldt again insists upon the undoubted influence which this surrounding of external Nature exercises upon the moral characteristics of peoples; then he paints with broad touches the various scenes which the different

zones of the earth present, according to the distribution and combination of vegetable forms, arranged by him into sixteen well-characterized groups.

Finally, it must not be forgotten what the vegetable kingdom provides for the domain of Art, in the shape of the elements of the Beautiful. Sculpture and architecture borrow elegant ornaments; painting goes to it as the richest source of the picturesque; and how many brilliant descriptions, how many graceful and grand images the poets of all ages have they not found in the wonders of the kingdom of plants!

And yet the development of natural Beauty does not stop there; it is only in the world of animal forms that it reaches to its most complete expression.

THE TOLD AND THE TELLING OF IT.*

In reading this volume, of some 350 pages, which we have *laboriously* done, we are led at once to ask ourselves, do the things that are told derive any advantage from the way of telling them? Certainly not. Is the substance of them a recompense for the lack of power in the diction? By no means. What, then, is the result? Tiresome stories, told in *classic* commonplace, for such is the designation put upon so palpable imitation of the worst qualities of the properly-designated *classic* poets. How would one of the old Grecian's steeds, harnessed to their heavy chariots, hold way with some of our modern racers in their agile gigs, with spider-leg wheels? A few college professors might think of the Olympian games, and glorious Greece, and burst their button-holes in exultation, but the lightning speed of the racer, with his grace and suppleness of limb, would gain the plaudits of such as can feel themselves grow active in view of the poetry of motion. The modern mind desires to be stirred by exhilaration, and prefers the unstable seat of the whirlwind-gig to the jolting of any lumbering chariot. There is a tension of the nerves required in the former, and nothing but a laxity in the latter.

Precisely analogous is the mental experience in reading the two styles we have endeavored to typify. For instance, in perusing a poem by Longfellow or Tennyson, we find ourselves slipping along so easily, and cheered on by the bravoes of so many way-side happy thoughts, that we reach the goal-end before we are aware of it, and with regret to find it so rapidly attained. In the other case, in reaching the same goal, what perils do we encounter! At stated intervals there are huge stumbling blocks to bounce over, and break up our course with a series of hitches. These impediments come in the shape of clumsy, long-drawn similes, which give you about as vivid an idea of the way of illustrating the nucleus-thought, as the aforesaid tumbling does of the rattling progress of the whirling gig.

Let us take an instance from the first poem in our volume, one entitled *Sohrab and Rustum*, and which we are constrained to believe, for all that there is in it, even our self-trammelled and system-proscribed

* Poems by MATTHEW ARNOLD. Boston: Ticknor & Co. 1856.